

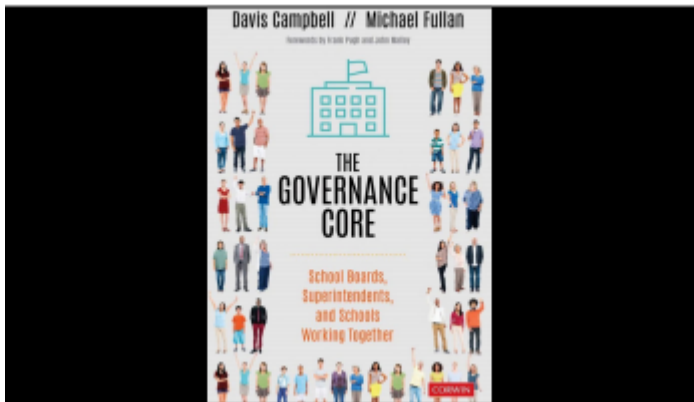
# TRUSTEE CONFERENCE REPORT

**Name:** Kathleen Woodcock      **Date Submitted:** January 27, 2020  
**Name of Conference:** Public Education Symposium (PES)  
**Sponsoring Organization:** Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA)  
**Theme (If any):** "Building Blocks of Leadership"  
**Conference Dates:** January 23 – 25, 2020  
**Location:** Sheraton Centre, Toronto, Ontario  
**Workshops/Seminars/Presentations/Keynote Speeches Attended:**  
**(Include a brief summary)**

**"Core Governance, Leadership and Deep Learning"**  
- Michael Fullan, Director, Global Leadership

Description: There is very little research on Trustee-Director relationships. This session will show how governance can focus on the moral imperative of all students learning, and how leadership at the district and school levels can mobilize deep learning (learning that sticks with you the rest of your life) to maximize achievement and equity across the system. Much of this work is grounded in practical examples coming from our work in partnerships with schools and school systems.

The following slides stood out for me as a trustee whose role is centered on governance. The complete presentation can be found here: <https://michaelfullan.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/20 OPSBA.Slide-deck.pdf>



## Politics vs Governance

- › Politics is what you do to get elected
- › Governance is what you (should do) between elections to run a good system
- › A crucial and ignored element is the transition from campaigning to governing

## GOVERNANCE MINDSET

**No matter what the initial reason for joining the board, commitment to a shared moral imperative and well-led governance system will build a strong foundation for sustainable excellence for all children.**

**Governance is about impact on learning; equity, excellence and well-being are intertwined.**

**Our main premise is that the vast majority of school board members are committed to improving the public education system.**

*It is mainly when unity of purpose and relationships are neglected that things go off track.*

## TIPS FOR TRUSTEES (5 OF 10)

1. You are in this for the long haul. It's a marathon, not a sprint.
2. Never forget that governance is a team sport. You may not like some members but it is your team now. If the board fails, you all fail.
3. Work hard to develop a shared moral imperative that will define the work of the board.
4. Work for system-wide coherence both within the board and with the board and the district.
5. If going to the board meeting is your most unpleasant experience, you are not doing it right.

## TIPS FOR DIRECTORS (5 OF 10)

1. Provide the board with engagement opportunities. Every question is a learning opportunity.
2. Count understanding, not votes. Votes get you short-term support, but understanding gets you long-term sustainability.
3. Make the board winners. Create value for them. Engage the board. Show them the impact of the district's programs on children in real time.
4. Support the board's community outreach and leadership.
5. If you hate or resent governance, maybe being a CEO is not for you.

## Effective Change is a Learning Proposition

The main work is not getting a decision on the books but rather getting change on the ground.



### “Polling, Politics and the Public”

- **Nikita James Nanos, CMC FMRIA, Chief Data Scientist and Founder, NANOS RESEARCH**

Description: Nanos Research is one of North America's premier research and strategy organizations. Since its founding in 1987, the firm has helped corporations, government agencies and advocacy associations understand, chart and shape the public mood. Nik Nanos, the firm's Chief Data Scientist will unpack polling, the public mood and how populist politics is rewiring democracy.

NB – Due to another commitment on behalf of the WRDSB, I was unable to stay for the complete presentation. For the full OPSBA/NANOS polling report, click on this link:

<https://www.opsba.org/strong-support-for-public-education-in-ontario>

### “Opening Ceremonies & Keynote Speaker”

- **Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education**

The Minister provided the government's perspective on education. A short Q&A followed the presentation.

### “The Nature of Leadership”

- **Ziya Tong, Canadian television personality and producer, formerly the co-host of Discovery Channel's primetime science magazine, Daily Planet**

Description: Human beings are not the only animals with leaders and followers. Many other species — from ants, to pigeons, to water buffalo — have leaders within their groups as well. Ziya Tong takes a fun and informative look at some of the most successful traits that have evolved in other species. In the process, we'll see how lessons from the animal kingdom can shape human behaviour so that we can become better leaders ourselves.

In this very entertaining presentation, Ms Tong provided her perspective on leaders/leadership qualities. Leaders solve problems, forge new paths, embrace new technologies, are efficient and can adjust to change. A good leader makes it easier for others to follow. Leaders foster independent thinking. Kindness/friendliness builds 'allyships' (allies) and leaders who exhibit those qualities usually are successful in their leadership roles. She suggested that leaders must never underestimate their followers as the type of follower can have a huge impact on the longevity of one's leadership role.

#### **“The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy – the Future of Trustees” panel discussion**

- **Michael Barrett, 1<sup>st</sup> VP OPSBA, Chair, Durham DSB**
- **Laurie French, Past President OPSBA, Trustee Limestone DSB**
- **Paul Wozney, President, Nova Scotia Teachers Union**

Description: School Board trustees are the oldest elected position in Canada. Recently some provinces have eliminated the role of elected trustees. Is this a trend that our communities should be concerned about? How does our understanding of our role within the Education Act impact our role, actions and behaviours? How do our actions impact the debate? What is happening in other provinces and what has been the impact upon public education? Do we have impact and a future or, by misunderstanding the role, are we leading our way into a self-fulfilling prophecy of elimination?

Mr. Barrett provided a personal view regarding the role of locally elected school trustees vis a vis governance responsibilities. His examples were topical and provided a personal perspective based on over 15 years of being in the trustee role. For emphasis, he referred to a quote from Stephen Covey, “You can't talk your way out of problems you behaved yourself into.”

Ms. French provided a cross-Canada summary of school boards in Canada. Information regarding board structure and trustee profile can be found at: <http://cdnsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Cross-Country-Overview-and-Trustee-Profile-FINAL-.pdf>. The Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) has published research about school board governance: <http://www.schoolboardsnl.ca/pdf/School-Boards-Matter-Report-Small.pdf>. Ms. French indicated that research shows that when school boards govern properly, student achievement goes up, which is ultimately every boards' goal/objective.

Ms. Wozney provided a stark description of what happens when school boards are removed/replaced with representatives for public education as appointed by the government. Parents lose the option for advocacy – there is no 'local' representative to contact if your child has an issue. Equity becomes an issue as politically appointed representatives separate along the lines of 'have' parents vs. 'have not' parents. There is no one to hold the government accountable. Senior staff run the school board and are accountable to politicians. As members of a governance board, trustees can speak out against legislation in a way that reflects their governance role.

#### **“Getting the Working Relationship to Work!” panel discussion**

- **Directors of Education and Chairs from Hamilton-Wentworth DSB, Halton DSB, Niagara DSB and Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario**

The panel members spoke about understanding their respective roles, communication during a crisis and communication during 'regular' times. Some highlights of the discussion:

- the need for respect between the director and the chair
- having confidence in each other and their abilities
- having clear communications plans (crisis and regular)
- reaching out to allies
- being nimble as a corporation, able to change plans/focus as easily as possible to address an emerging situation
- remember to 'support the supporters' – everyone needs time/activities to reduce stress and debrief
- meet on a regular basis


- remember senior team are the education experts and trustees are the political/community experts
- be good listeners – listen to the students, the staff, the parents, the community
- keep confidentiality

### “Connecting Governance and Leadership to Impact within Public Education”

- **Nouman Ashraf, Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, Director, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion, Rotman School of Management**

Description - Effective governance within the public education sector is predicated upon connecting leadership excellence with governance oversight, in pursuit of impactful outcomes. In this interactive session, Professor Nouman Ashraf will share strategies and actionable tactics that enable board members to fulfill their fiduciary oversight role, discharge their strategic foresight duties, and bring a level of generative discussion that builds organizational capacity and resilience.

Some tips/thoughts from Dr. Ashraf’s presentation:

- There’s knowledge creation and knowledge mobilization – 2 different things
- To be leaders so good governance has a real impact, requires a change in structural viewpoint
- “Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will.” - Frederick Douglass
- We need to work on the organization and not simply work for the organization
- Duty of care = giving a darn!
- Cultural prosperity and economic prosperity result from education
- Organizational learning happens in 3D (comfort zone\safe space); create a safe space and make it safe to discuss ‘undiscussables’; insist on feedback
- Public education is all about crating ‘adaptive experts’
- Impact demands a shift...knowledge holders  experience creators
- Serving one’s purpose can be incredibly rewarding

Interesting TED Talk by Nouman Ashraf, ‘Leadership with Purpose – How to Reframe Leadership for Impact’ click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FmnxEMG8Ti8>

### “Legal Restrictions on the Role of Trustee as Advocate”

- **Gillian Tuck Kutarna, Partner, Miller Thomson LLP**

The presenter provided information regarding the legal definition of the role of trustee, and the implications of that definition; advocating on behalf of a parent, community group or employee; legal parameters in the Education Act and related statues and case law.

- Duties of the Board of Trustees – the *Education Act* prescribes the strategic plan as a governance tool; resolutions approved by the Board of Trustees are the only thing legally binding on the Director rather than any meetings or chats that you might have; the Board speaks through its resolutions
- A Trustee’s Duties - if elected, you have a duty to perform the duties; consultation with the community is a duty of a trustee; Trustees have a fiduciary duty to the corporate board of education i.e., the interests of the board must be paramount; decision made are those of a reasonably prudent person in similar circumstances; trustees are not liable for errors in judgment
- There is a duty of care - knowledge, loyalty, confidentiality, avoid conflict of interest, act within scope of statutory authority
- Limits of a Trustee include advancing the interest of an individual; directing staff; access or disclose personal information; share information that is confidential; become involved in day to day operations; make commitments to parents
- Democratic Governance – majority view has the right to govern and the minority view has the right to be heard; minority report needs to be filed before the vote

- Trustee rights include participate in governance, notice of meeting, attend meetings, sufficient inform to make informed decision, discuss, Request background information and reports and VOTE
- Trustees are a parent resource, not a parent representative

### **“OPSBA Central West Regional Meeting”**

- **Donna Danielli, Regional Chair and Penny Mustin, OPSBA Staff Liaison**

Central West Region member boards: District School Board of Niagara, Grand Erie DSB, Halton DSB, Hamilton Wentworth DSB, KidsAbility School Authority, Niagara Peninsula Children’s Centre School Authority, Peel DSB, Upper Grand DSB, Waterloo Region DSB

- Agenda included following topics:
  - Labour relations update
  - OPSBA/Nanos Polling Results
  - Preliminary discussion of 2020-21 priorities
  - 2020-21 Grants for Student Needs
  - Local issues/board updates
- Next regional meeting scheduled for Saturday, March 28, 2020 at Hamilton Wentworth DSB

### **“TED Ed Student Panel**

- **Will Gourley, educator, TED Ed Student Voice Coach, York Region School Board and four students from York District School Board**

The students responded to prepared questions and from the audience:

- Why do they (students) need their voices heard?
  - To feel valued
  - Combine trustees’ pragmatism and students’ ambition
  - Ability to discover what they want to talk about
  - Teachers, systems and community need to collaborate to support students’ ideas
- What is missing for students to have an opportunity to talk about their issues (biggest barrier)?
  - Haven’t seen results from consultation – we ask them for input, and they don’t see anything happening
  - Adults shut students down or shut them out
  - Students are their own barrier sometimes
  - Change from kids is not listened to – always get backlash on-line/negativity
  - Students lack a platform – outreach events, more \$ for clubs
- What is on the minds of students?
  - Students don’t know student trustees exist
  - Use student trustees to bridge the gap with students
  - Student voice is a platform to work with adults
  - Need better supports and/or making the supports better known to students
- How do you take your place in planning for the future?
  - Pragmatism alone doesn’t shut students down – students sometimes need to understand what is possible that helps them achieve their goals
  - Adults explaining what can be done with some tweaking is more positive; pragmatism is an approach to putting action in place
  - Communicate to students the way they communicate with each other
  - Including marginalized voices i.e., diverse voice

In addition to the professional development/educational and motivational sessions, the symposium provides an opportunity to network with trustee colleagues across the province. This networking builds relationships and understanding amongst trustees who are experiencing similar challenges and

successes in their respective systems. This dialogue is invaluable as trustees gain insight into new methods for problem-solving and celebrating success.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kathleen Woodcock